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INFO RUCNASE/ASEAN MEMBER COLLECTIVE
RUEHGG/UN SECURITY COUNCIL COLLECTIVE
RUEHBY/AMEMBASSY CANBERRA 2057
RUEHNE/AMEMBASSY NEW DELHI 5532
RUEHUL/AMEMBASSY SEOUL 9128
RUEHKO/AMEMBASSY TOKYO 6705
RUEAIIA/CIA WASHDC
RHHMUNA/CDR USPACOM HONOLULU HI
RUEHGV/USMISSION GENEVA 4515
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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 RANGOON 000364

SIPDIS

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SUBJECT: BURMA: SINGAPORE SENIOR MINISTER GOH - THAN SHWE
MEETING

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Classified By: Political Officer Sean K. O'Neill for Reasons 1.4 (b) & (d)

Summary

1. (SBU) According to the Singapore Ambassador in Rangoon, Singapore Senior Minister Goh Chok Tong had a "frank and candid exchange of views" with his "old friends" Burmese Senior General Than Shwe and PM Thein Sein in a meeting on June 9. Goh flagged serious international concerns about the 2010 elections, the Aung San Suu Kyi (ASSK) trial, and her role in the political process. He suggested the regime consider commuting any court sentence, since the legitimacy of elections will require ASSK to be available to campaign for her party. Goh described the impact of such issues on the ongoing U.S. policy review. Than Shwe appeared to take Goh's comments about the U.S. review on board. He promised "free and fair" elections in 2010, but complained that ASSK sticks to her "old ideas." He said he is prepared to meet with her if she calls for lifting of sanctions and abandons confrontational and obstructive actions (all a standard regime formulation). End summary.

2. (SBU) On June 16, Singapore Ambassador to Burma Robert Chua briefed the diplomatic corps on Singapore Senior Minister Goh's June 9 meetings with Than Shwe and Prime Minister Thein Sein in Nay Pyi Taw. Each meeting lasted for over an hour. Goh came as "an old friend," and the leaders had "a frank and candid conversation." During the June 8-11 visit, Goh also traveled to Rangoon, Mandalay, and Taungyi in Shan State where he met with the respective regional military commanders.

2010 Elections

3. (SBU) Goh proposed to Than Shwe that the run-up to elections in 2010 is critical for Burma's internal stability. The international community is watching closely. It is important for the Burmese people and the international community to perceive the elections as free, fair, and

inclusive. Those judgments will determine if the elections are seen as credible. Goh said that, if ASSK is shut out of the 2010 election process, the vote will be seen to lack legitimacy. If ASSK is in jail or remains in detention or house arrest during the election process, the international community would view the regime as having taken advantage of the Yettaw incident to deny ASSK the chance to campaign for her party.

ASSK Trial

¶4. (SBU) Goh told Than Shwe he believes the ASSK trial is a domestic matter, but it has an international dimension the GOB should not ignore. Goh suggested that, while the legal process should be allowed to run its course, the regime has the prerogative to commute any sentence that is eventually handed down.

US Policy Review

¶5. (SBU) Goh noted to Than Shwe that the U.S. is reviewing its foreign policies and President Obama has a genuine interest in working to reach out to countries with which the U.S. has had difficult relations, including Burma, even though Burma "is not a priority compared to direct threats from some other countries." Goh commented that ASSK's arrest and trial have complicated the U.S. policy review regarding constructive engagement with Burma. When asked, Chua said Than Shwe's reaction was to acknowledge the point about the U.S. review, but he did not respond substantively.

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Than Shwe's Rejoinder

¶6. (SBU) According to Chua, Than Shwe and Thein Sein both declared that the GOB is committed to free and fair elections in 2010. Than Shwe lamented that it is difficult to talk to ASSK because she has persisted in sticking to her "old ideas." Than Shwe said he has been forced to make a choice between national stability and accommodating ASSK's demands. Reflecting a position the regime first took in October 2007, Than Shwe declared that, as ASSK is responsible for international sanctions, Than Shwe is prepared to meet with her if she calls for lifting of sanctions and abandons confrontational and destructive actions. Goh responded by referring to ASSK's meeting with representatives from the diplomatic corps on May 20, when she mentioned national reconciliation, expressed hope that something good could come from the Yettaw incident, and said she does not want to use Yettaw to hit at the GOB.

The Singaporean Take Away

¶7. (SBU) Ambassador Chua said Singapore believes Than Shwe understood the messages conveyed by Senior Minister Goh, but it remains to be seen how the regime will follow up.

Comment

¶8. (C) Prior to the briefing, Ambassador Chua used a pull-aside with Charge to confirm that Singapore Foreign Minister Yeo conveyed the substance of the Secretary's phone message to Senior Minister Goh just as the Goh party reached Nay Pyi Taw. While Chua made no mention of the Secretary's conversation in his dip-corps briefing, it appears clear that Goh did convey quite clearly the USG message to Burma's most senior leadership. As Chua noted, it remains to be seen how the regime will respond.

DINGER